

Army works towards implementing standard child care fees in accordance with new DoD policy

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – Beginning October 1, 2010, most Army Families will see an increase in their child care fees, while others will see a reduction and some will see no change in fees for School Year 2010-2011. This is a result of a new Department of Defense policy.

According to Maj. Gen. Reuben Jones, commander of the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command, the Army will ensure outstanding Child and Youth Programs and a quality of life for Soldiers and Families commensurate with their service.

“Army Families will continue to have access to some of the best Child and Youth Programs found anywhere in the world,” Jones said. “These programs are an important part of our military communities and will continue to be a great value for our Soldiers and their Families”

The Army Family Action Plan also played an important role in shaping the new policy. One result of AFAP was an expansion in the number of income categories to better reflect the full range of family incomes found across the Army.

By law, child care fees are based on total family income (excluding certain special pay and allowances), not rank or civilian grade. In 2008, DoD conducted an in-depth study of the child development program fee policy. As a result, they determined current fee ranges were no longer in sync with the total family income for a majority of the users, and the fees have not kept pace with the increasing costs of providing care.

“While the cost of providing child care has risen each of the past six years, the value of the programs has also increased for Soldiers, their children and the Army,” said Peggy Hinson, Child Youth and School Services Director at FMWRC.

“Our child care programs promote early learning. Most Army programs are nationally accredited, and most importantly, Soldiers can concentrate on their mission, knowing their children are safe and well cared for in a fully-accredited child care system,” she explained.

The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, the country’s leading voice for child care, issues a biennial report on the quality of nationwide child care, including the DoD. The 2007 study found that the DoD child care system “stands alone as a model for states.” In that report, military child care ranked first among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, and was the only entity to score in the top ten for both standards and oversight criteria.

Since 2004, child care fees at most Army garrisons have remained static in an attempt to ease the burden of persistent conflict and multiple deployments. In an effort to minimize the financial impact of fee increases, the Army received approval from DoD to begin a phased-in implementation of this new Child Care Fee Policy. Individual installations will have plans to reach fixed dollar amounts for each fee category within the next three years.

A 2009 update confirmed that DoD child care continues to score more than 60 percent above the national average.

“It’s important, in keeping with the promises made in the Army Family Covenant, that we do everything we can to minimize the impact the DoD fee changes will have on our Soldiers and their Families,” said Jones.

Currently there are six fee categories, including a minimum fixed rate and five income-based categories, each with a range of fees determined by the garrison.

The School Year 2010-2011 Child Care Fee Policy will contain nine categories, with three added at the top to more accurately accommodate higher incomes.

Under existing policy, Families earning \$70,001 pay the same fees as those making more than \$100,000. The three additional categories will raise fees incrementally to cover Families earning \$125,001 or more annually.

Those earning \$85,000 and below will see smaller increases. Furthermore, some lower-income Families will pay reduced fees under the new policy. As always, Families with more than one child will receive multiple child reductions, regardless of total family income. This now will become an Army-wide standard 15% discount for 2nd and subsequent children.

Commanders may authorize additional fee reductions for Families with temporary, documented financial hardships. Army Family Covenant fee reductions are in effect, while military parents are deployed.

In addition to Child Development Center fees, The Army’s 2010-2011 Fee Policy covers all Child, Youth and School Services Programs, including: Full Day; Part Day; Part Time; School Age and Hourly Care; Family Child Care Homes; *Skies Unlimited* Instructional Programs and Youth Sports.

Families will receive information about their specific fee changes beginning mid-August, through personal contacts at their CYSS location. Additional information will be provided through town hall meetings, social media, radio and television commercials and print materials. The Army will launch a website in late August to provide additional information on its School Year 2010-2011 Child Care Fee Policy.

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